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PAGE 01 BRUSSE 01351 051833Z

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SUBJECT: HENRI SIMONET'S ANALYSIS OF THE BELGIAN PLITICAL SITUATION

REF: A. BRUSSELS 726

B. BRUSSELS A-57 MARCH 4

1. SUMMARY AND COMMENT: IN TWO MEMORDANDA ADDRESSED PERSONALLY TO AMBASSADOR STRAUSS-HUPE THE BELGIAN SOCIALIST PARTY FIGURE AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE EC COMMISSION HENRI SIMONET ANALYSES THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 BRUSSE 01351 051833Z

ELECTORAL AND POST-ELECTORAL TACTICAL SITUATIONS OF THE MAJOR

POLITICAL PARTIES. UNLIKE THE BRITISH CASE IT IS COMPLETELY PREDICTABLE THAT NO BELGIAN PARTY WILL COME CLOSE TO WINNING A MAJORITY; THE BELGIAN ELECTIONS DO NOT PROMISE AN OUTCOME THAT WILL MAKE FORMING A NEW GOVERNMENT AN EASY MATTER. SIMONET HAS TOLD US HE EXPECTS A CHANGE OF ONLY THREE OR FOUR OF THE 212 SEATS IN THE HOUSE. NEVERTHELESS, MINOR PERCENTAGE CHANGES COMPARED WITH THE PERCENTAGES OF THE POPULAR VOTE WON BY EACH PARTY IN NOVEMBER 1971 COULD HAVE AN IMPORTANCE BEARING ON TACTICAL DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN AFTER THE MARCH 10 ELECTIONS BY EACH OF THE PARTIES AS TO PARTICIPATION IN THE NEXT COALITION GOVERNMENT. SIMONET BELIEVES THE ONLY REASONABLY CREDIBLE FUTURE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ANOTHER SOCIALIST-LED COALITION WITH THE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS. HIS PERSONAL AMBITION, HOWEVER, MIGHT BE BETTER SERVED IF THE SOCIALIST PARTY WERE TO REMAIN IN OPPOSITION LONG ENOUGH FOR HIM TO FINISH OUT TERM AS EC COMMISSION VICE PRESIDENT BEFORE RETURNING TO HIGH OFFICE IN THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT. SIMONET AVOIDS PREDICTING GAINS OR LOSSES FOR ANY OF THE BELGIAN PARTIES. HE SUGGESTS INSTEAD THAT THE ONLY DEVELOPMENT THAT MIGHT CHANGE THE PRESENT POLITICAL BALANCE IN ONE DIRECTION OR ANOTHER WOULD BE FOR ONE OR MORE OF THE "COMMUNITY" (LINGUISTIC/FEDERALIST) PARTIES TO MAKE AN IDEOLOGICAL CHOICE THAT WOULD DETERMINE THE NATURE OF THE COALITION IN WHICH IT MIGHT TAKE PART. END SUMMARY.

2. SIMONET'S STATUS. ON-STAGE, THE PSB STARS ARE PARTY CO-PRESIDENT ANDRE COOLS AND THE WIDELY-ADMIRED 36-YEAR OLD MINISTER FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, WILLY CLAES. INHIBITED BY HIS EC RESPONSIBILITY, SIMONET STANDS OFF-STAGE BUT BECAUSE HIS IS THE "FIRST SUPPLEANT" ON THE PSB LIST IN BRUSSELS, HIS RETURN TO PARLIAMENTARY AND MINISTERIAL ACTIVITY COULD BE EASILY ARRANGED AT A CONVENIENT FUTURE MOMENT.

3. IMPASSE. SIMONET ATTRIBUTES THE FALL OF THE LEBURTON GOVERNMENT TO THE INABILITY OF THE COALITION PARTIES TO WORK OUT A MUTUALLY-ACCEPTABLE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMS ALREADY AGREED UPON IN PRINCIPLE, NOTABLY IN REGIONALIZATION. IN HIS VIEW, THE OCTOBER WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE RESULTING ENERGY CRISIS DID MORE TO DELAY THEN TO PRECIPITATE THE FALL OF THE LEBURTON GOVERNMENT. THE OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES ON WHICH THE GOVERNING PARTIES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BRUSSE 01351 051833Z

WERE AT AN IMPASSE INCLUDED LIBERALIZATION OF ABORTION LAWS, AND CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE AND FINANCING OF THE SYSTEM OF PUBLIC AND CATHOLIC CHURCH SCHOOLS IN BELGIUM.

4. SOCIALIST "RADICALIZATION". SIMONET DESCRIBES THE PSB PROGRAM AS "COMBINING DIRIGISME AND LAICITY". THIS MEANS SEEKING THE ENTRY OF THE "PUBLIC SECTOR" INTO NEW AREAS OF INDUSTRY (E.G. PETROLEUM), GREATER GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER ENERGY AND PRICES;

ALSO LEGALIZED ABORTION, AND SUPPORT FOR MEASURES THAT WOULD ERODE THE CATHOLIC PAROCHIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM BY CREATING "PLURALIST" SCHOOLS IN WHICH BOTH CHURCH AND NON-CHURCH VIEWPOINTS WOULD BE AVAILABLE.

5. LABOR. SIMONET EMPHASIZES THE NEW AND CLOSER TIES BETWEEN THE SOCIALIST-ORIENTED FEDERATION GENERALE DU TRAVAIL DE BELGIQUE AND THE PSB. (THIS IN EFFECT PROMOTES GREATER "RADICALIZATION" IN BELGIAN POLITICAL-ECONOMIC LIFE BY MAKING IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE FGTB TO ENGAGE IN NON-PARTISAN COOPERATION WITH THE CATHOLIC-ORIENTED CONFEDERATION DES SYNDICATS CHRETIENS.)

6. POPULAR FRONT. SIMONET SEES "THE RALLYING OF PROGRESSIVES" IN BELGIUM AS AMOUNTING TO TRYING TO MAKE STEW BY MIXING ONE LARGE SOCIALIST HORSE WITH ONE LITTLE COMMUNIST PARTY SPARROW, AND ONE LEFT-WING CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC DOVE, THE WHOLE NOT CHANGING THINGS MUCH.

7. REGIONALIZATION. SIMONET SEES AS SIGNIFICANT THE TENDENCY FOR THE FLEMISH SOCIAL CHRISTIANS TO FAVOR A THOROUGH-GOING REGIONALIZATION APPROACHING FEDERALISM, WHILE THE WALLONIAN SOCIAL CHRISTIANS REMAIN ESSENTIALLY LOYAL TO THE CONCEPTS OF A UNITARY STATE AND FAVOR ONLY A MODERATE DEGREE OF REGIONALIZATION. SIMONET SUGGESTS THAT THE LINGUISTIC/FEDERALIST PARTIES (WHOSE GAINS IN THE 1971 ELECTIONS EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS AND WHO ARE EXPECTED TO MAKE FURTHER GAINS) WILL HAVE A CERTAIN ELECTORAL ADVANTAGE IN EXPLOITING POPULAR DESIRES FOR A GREATER DEGREE OF REGIONALIZATION AND FEDERALISM. HE THINKS THIS ADVANTAGE MIGHT TEND TO DISSIPATE IF AND WHEN REGIONALIST PARTIES ASSUME THE RESPONSIBILITIES THEY WOULD HAVE TO ACCEPT IF THEY WERE TO TAKE PART IN A FUTURE GOVERNMENT.

8. STATUS OF BRUSSELS. SIMONET SHEDS SOME LIGHT ON THE COMPLICATED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 BRUSSE 01351 051833Z

QUESTION OF PARTY ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE STATUS OF BRUSSELS AND ITS SURROUNDING REGION WITH RESPECT TO REGIONALIZATION. HE INDICATES THAT A JOINT PSB FGTB POSITION ON THE FUTURE OF BRUSSELS IMPLIES ACCEPTANCE OF LIMITING BRUSSELS WITHIN THE CONFINES OF ITS PRESENT 19 COMMUNES. THIS GOES AGAINST THE PREFERENCES OF PSB ELEMENTS FROM WALLONIA (AND NO DOUBT FROM BRUSSELS AS WELL). HE NOTES THAT THE ISSUE OF THE FUTURE POSITION OF BRUSSELS AS A REGION CAUSES DISCORD WITHIN BOTH THE PSB AND THE JOINT SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PSC/CVP FORMATION.

9. THE LINGUISTIC PARTIES. THE FLEMISH VOLKSUNIE WANTS BELGIUM TO CONSIST OF ONLY TWO REGIONS. THIS WOULD DENY BRUSSELS THE BALANCE OF POWER POSITION IT WOULD HAVE AS A REGION. THE LEADING POLITICAL PARTY IN BRUSSELS, THE FRANCOPHONE FRONT, WANTS BRUSSELS TO HAVE FULL STATUS AS ONE OF THE THREE REGIONS

OF A FEDERALIZED BELGIUM, AND TO INCLUDE A GREATER BRUSSELS
WXCEEDING THE LIMITS OF ITS ORIGINAL 19 COMMUNES. ITS WALLONIAN
PARTNER, THE WALLONIAN RALLY, SIMONET RECALLS, HAS EXPRESSED
A WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT PARTICIPATION IN A CVP-LED GOVERNMENT,
WITHOUT INSISTING ON UNEQUIVOCAL RECOGNITION OF
BRUSSELS AS A REGION.

10. CONCLUSION. DIRECTLY AFTER THE FALL OF THE SOCIALIST-SOCIAL
CHRISTIAN COALITION GOVERNMENT IN MID-JANUARY, THE FLEMISH CATHOLIC
(CVP) LEADER LEO TINDELANS EXPLORED THE POSSIBILITIES OF AN
ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT WITHOUT THE SOCIALISTS INCLUDING
SEVERAL OF THE LINGUISTIC/FEDERALIST PARTIES. WITHOUT THE AGREEMENT
OF THE WALLONIAN PSC, THIS PROVED IMPOSSIBLE. AS SIMONET'S
ANALYSIS IMPLIES, THE RESULTS OF THE MARCH 10 CONSULTATION MUST
BE EXAMINED TO SEE WHETHER THEY MAKE A GOVERNMENT WITHOUT THE PSB MOR
E
CREDIBLE. STRAUSSZ-HUPE

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